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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how elitism and anti-intellectualism have affected the teaching of intellectually gifted students. It examines methods of identifying the intellectually gifted child. It traces trends in education of the gifted through history and discusses the issues of equity, elitism, and anti-intellectualism which have resulted in discrimination against gifted children. The purpose of education is addressed, concluding that an anti-intellectual approach to education has been developed which sees children as a form of capital to be developed rather than allowing them the luxury of developing their minds without a specific or practical purpose. Methods of educating gifted students are outlined, including acceleration, pull-out programs, and homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. The role of teachers and administrators in educating the intellectually gifted is analyzed. Three proposals to benefit public education are presented: (1) look carefully at the successes of the private schools and incorporate ideas that have worked; (2) have preservice teachers follow a rigorous course of study in liberal arts or math and science before studying for a graduate degree in education; and (3) encourage the growth of private schools. The paper also advocates small schools in which students work with a relatively small number of teachers, with some heterogeneous grouping and some homogeneous grouping in accelerated programs that are relevant to the curriculum. (Contains 55 references.) (JDD)

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BEWARE THE GIFTED

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FOREWORD

My interest in anti-intellectualism started when a boy who had just been "double cut out" from his chosen partner , stopped dancing with me , looked me in the eye and said "You're too smart, I can't dance with you." I didn't know what I could have said in 45 seconds of small talk but clearly it had not had the effect I'd hoped for. In this paper, I have chosen not to address the very confusing subject of the differing ways society views and educates intellectually gifted boys and girls. It is certainly a subject worthy of another paper.

In this paper I have tried to understand how elitism and anti-intellectualism have affected the teaching of intellectually gifted students. I consider various methods of teaching the gifted including acceleration, pull-out programs, homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. Finally, I make three 'modest proposals' which I think would benefit public education.

EDUCATION OF INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED CHILDREN

The answer to the question of how to educate children who are especially gifted or talented is deeply rooted in American culture and reflects changing attitudes of our society. To better understand how American society views the gifted and talented we must look at our own history.

De Toqueville warned:

> I am not so much alarmed at the excessive liberty which reigns in that country as at the inadequate securities which one finds there against tyranny.... I do not say that there is a frequent use of tyranny in America at the present day; but I maintain that there is no sure barrier against it, and that the causes which mitigate the government there are to be found in the circumstances and the manners of the country more than in its laws
>
> de Toqueville, 1945:269-272

In the national debate about educating the gifted and talented, it is clear that the majority has "tyrannized" but unclear how to define the majority. For some, the majority consists of those who control influence and power and enjoy high socioeconomic status; for others the majority consists of those who are *not* defined as gifted or talented. I think each majority has "tyrannized" the other at different times and continues to do so.

DEFINING THE GIFTED AND TALENTED:

Many authors have struggled with a definition of giftedness. The awkwardness of defining some children as gifted and talented is obviously that one simultaneously defines others as less gifted or talented. In a society based on democratic ideals labeling the gifted as somehow "better" than other children seems unpatriotic. Let us first discuss a definition and then look at ways in which children so defined have been educated in our country.

After noting that there is little agreement on a definition of giftedness, the authors of a text on special education identify three components of giftedness: "1. High ability (including high intelligence), 2. High creativity (the ability to formulate new ideas and apply them to the solution of problems), 3. High task commitment (a high level of motivation and the ability to see a project through to its conclusion) (Hallahan, 1991:406). "

Others argue that using high scores on standardized tests to cut some students out of special programs for the gifted is unfair and that gifted children should be defined by their performance. " There are certain student characteristics related to potential giftedness that can be more validly and reliably appraised by teachers, parents, and others who have extended opportunities to observe students." These characteristics include the "student's use of language, ... quality of ...questions,...examples, illustrations , or elaborations; use of quantitative expressive and quantitative reasoning,...problem-solving,,,special or unusual skills,...innovative use of common materials..., breadth of information,...depth of information,. .collection of materials or hobbies (Hagan, 199 , 1-2)."

The U.S. Department of Education has defined giftedness:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and the society.
>
> Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:
>
> 1. General intellectual ability
> 2. Specific academic aptitude
> 3. Creative or productive thinking

4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts.
6. Psychomotor ability.

McClellan, 1985, 1

Many experts in the field disagree with this definition finding it too limited (Renzulli) or dangerously "elitist" (Feldman). However, the federal government uses this definition in funding programs for education of the gifted and talented through the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 and the Regulations for the Educational Security Act of 1984.

In this paper I will focus on children who demonstrate intellectual ability or intelligence in intellectual pursuits. Intellect defined as "the power of knowing.. of reasoning, judging, comprehending, etc. understanding" is closely related but not identical to intelligence, defined as " the power or act of understanding; intellect or mind in operation (Webster, 1960:437).

IDENTIFYING THE INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED CHILD:

Although educators think it wise to use several methods to identify intellectually gifted children, almost all rely heavily on standardized testing, preferring to use the Wechsler scales and the Stanford-Binet (Feldhuysen, 1989:7). The gifted are generally defined as children scoring in the top 3 - 5%, by demonstrating an IQ of 130 and above, which has historical roots in the work of Lewis Terman (Seligman, 1992:44; Shurkin, 1993:32; Sapon-Shavin, 1987:40).

Local schools such as Conners-Emerson Elementary School in Bar Harbor Maine, admit children who score at or above the 90th percentile to a pool from which a percentage of children, with the recommendations of their teachers and parents, are chosen to participate in programs for the gifted (Interview, 1992). In

1991-92 the State of Maine offered special education to 10,200 students , slightly less than five percent of the school population (Maine Dept. Ed, 199 - :8). Unfortunately, achild with an IQ of 130+ may be eligible one year for special education if sh/e is in the top five percent of his or her school or class. However, if in another year the same score falls below the five percent cutoff, s/he will not be included in the program.

ORIGINS OF EDUCATION FOR THE INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED:

Schools in a homogeneous society such as those in villages of New England in the 17th and 18th centuries could un-selfconsciously mold children to the norms of the culture. Only as population diversified through increased immigration did society have to exert a self-conscious effort to replicate itself.

The common schools created by reformers such as Horace Mann had to deal with large numbers of children whose parents had immigrated to the United States of America. Unlike earlier immigrants motivated by religious faith, the faith of later immigrants was usually incidental to their decision to leave their homeland. The primary impetus for uprooting was poverty and their relative lack of success in their society of origin. Earlier immigrants, priamrily of English origin, sought religious freedom, and often were well-educated and well-to-do. Later immigrants, such as the Irish, and non-English speaking immigrants such as the Italian, were certainly courageous and enterprising, but they were driven out by poverty and financial failure. Those who remained had succeeded or were too depressed to leave. " These were not ambitious farmers and artisans seeking to improve their circumstances in a new land but involuntary refugees from economic catastrophe (Glenn, 1988:65)."

Then , as now, educators seemed to forget that these immigrants had been denied a first-class education in their countries of origin. Giving them a second-

rate education in their adopted country hardly seemed or seems fair preparation for participation in democracy and "the good life." However, Mann and the Progressives designed an educational system to socialize these immigrants , a "common school" to inculcate American values in a population they considered "incapable of mastering academic subject matter (Toch, 1991:43). "

Two branches of thought significant for education emerged in the early 20th century: Social Darwinism influenced by Herbert Spencer and Progressive education by William James and John Dewey. Spencer, who through his student, G. Stanley Hall (later President of Clark University), influenced Lewis Terman, believed that the rich were those best endowed and their rise to the top, like cream over milk, was preordained by their fitness to succeed. A high IQ was the inherited means to and justification for success. Social Darwinism also seemed to justify the pattern of business and social success enjoyed by a few Americans, particularly before the great Depression forced them to reconsider its validity.

In 1893, the "Committee of Ten" had "argued that the primary task of secondary education should be to develop and discipline students' minds through the teaching of academic subject matter. To achieve their goal of 'training the powers of observation, memory, expression, and reasoning,... [students would select one of] four alternative courses of study - a classical course, a Latin-scientific course, a modern language course, [or] an English course,' " all requiring rigorous preparation. In 1901, Charles Eliot, President of Harvard University debated President G. Stanley Hall. Hall argued that high schools "should adapt their curricula ' to the great majority who begin the high school [and] do not finish, instead of focusing our energies on the few who went to college.' " Eliot wanted to "concentrate on the academic core.... He wanted all students to enjoy the same intellectual birthright through secondary school,

and he opposed what he saw as a second-class curriculum for some in occupational or practical subjects (Grant, 1988:21). Eliot lost, and so I think, did we all.

At that time, "less than 9 percent of all those of high school age were enrolled in school, and fewer still - 6 percent- actually graduated (Toch, 1991:42). Within ten years the premises underlying education in the United States eroded under waves of immigration and society's demands that new arrivals be Americanized. "Very rapidly, the American secondary school was transformed from an exclusive enclave of the best and brightest into an institution of the masses (Toch, 1991:43.)

In reaction to their view that traditional classical education was unsuitable for immigrants, Progressives such as James and Dewey stressed the importance of " the social context, the plasticity of the human mind and principles of acquired habit," in other words the environment.

> Dewey pointed out again and again that education was not a matter of educating a fixed human nature in a formal curriculum; instead, an attempt must be made to adjust the whole child to the total cultural environment.... This view of education was infinitely compatible with one of the main tasks of the American school in the first half of this century: the assimilation of the children of immigrants into the main stream of American life.
>
> Baltzell, 1964:167

As Toch and others have shown, the simultaneous creation of methods to gauge intelligence by using standardized tests "offered secondary school educators [something] ..they sought desperately-... an efficient and 'scientific' way to manage the mass of new students (Toch, 1991:44). Although, using standardized tests to sort and label children may seem suspect now, in the early decades of the twentieth century, it fit society's definition of what it was to be

modern. Henry Ford didn't just create an assembly line to produce cars; he also helped create a culture that modeled institutions such as schools on the efficiency and mass production of the ideal factory. It seems likely, though I have not found corroboration, that our success in producing the machinery for World Wars I and II further confirmed Americans' faith in the efficacy of the factory model.

The Progressives had an important influence on the teaching of gifted students. Craig Howley points out that:

> influential in the pedagogy of gifted students, are certain notions propagated by the Progressives (e.g., child-centered pedagogy, problem-solving and higher-thinking skills, social studies, ability grouping, and vocational training.) In their 'value-free' forms these notions are part of the ideology of public schooling, even if they are not practiced as Dewey and Counts might have intended them to be.
>
> Howley, 1987:176

The good intentions of the Progressives were ground down to meet the misinterpreted needs of an immigrant population. Because they rarely spoke good English, had social skills or were well-dressed, intellectually gifted immigrant children were not likely to be included in advanced classes. For them, and other children deemed incapable of handling a rigorous curriculum, the study of history became an amalgam called social studies, mathematics became business math, and 'life skills' supplanted academic skills. Teaching the 'whole child' required that the school assume the duties of parent, church, and community, roles it was and is poorly equipped to handle. Problem-solving focused young minds on solutions to narrow problems, practical 'outcomes' and vocations. Those least prepared to make choices about their futures had the most choice in a bewildering curriculum.

By 1930:

> a new system of secondary studies had been installed, in which a small minority of college-bound students were [sic] expected to pursue intellectually serious work while everyone else was taking courses explicitly designed for those less able, less willing , or less interested. American educators quickly built a system around the assumption that most students didn't have what it took to be serious about the great issues of human life, and that even if they had the wit, they had neither the will nor the futures that would support heavy-duty study.
>
> Powell,1985:245

Teachers eager to offer useful and usable pedagogy, administrators eager to aggrandize their dominion over larger comprehensive high schools and Progressive thinkers committed to the democratic 'crusade' all supported these reforms. By the 1930s a "national survey of secondary schools concluded that the old practice of requiring all students to take academically serious courses ' is being abandoned' (Powell, 1985:250)."

During the middle decades of the twentieth century, rapid consolidation of schools increased the size of those remaining, and their ability to offer tracks appealing to parents and students. James Conant, the best known proponent of the consolidated high school claimed, " I think it safe to say that the comprehensive high school is characteristic of our society and further that it has come into being because of our economic history and our devotion to the ideals of equality of opportunity and equality of status (Conant, 1958:8)." Although the curriculum as a whole had been "dumbed down" , advanced courses still existed to prepare certain students for college.

In the post-Sputnik era, education for the gifted became important; however, concern in the sixties about fairness and equity soon dulled this focus. Passage of Civil Rights laws accelerated tracking, creating schools within schools where those on different tracks rarely met. Another effect of the ferment in the 1960's

was to caste education for the gifted as elitist and anti-democratic. The reasons behind this are complex, involving all constituencies of the schools and the society they reflect.

EQUITY:

1. The state of being equal or fair; fairness in dealing.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

In The United States of America, the two aspects of the word equity - quality and fairness - remain entwined which leads to destructive confusion. Daniel Seligman, an apologist for Jensen, writes:

> You sometimes hear formulations implying that the equal rights constitutionally guaranteed to Americans are somehow dependent on a consensus judgment that all people (and all ethnic groups) are truly equal in ability...
>
> In addition to being pernicious, the argument rests on a stunning non sequitur. Equality of rights in the United States does not depend on a belief in equal ability.
>
> Seligman, 1991: p 194-195.

We build ourselves into an impossible box as we distort Jefferson's vision that all men (and women) are created equal in the body politic or even that all people should have equal opportunity to the idea that all people are created equally or similarly gifted and talented.

Conant tells us that " when Thomas Jefferson wrote of equality, he was thinking of political equality..." He had in mind " the contrast between a new society without hereditary titles and an old society with an aristocracy. " However, in the 19th century equality became "equality of opportunity-an equal start in a competitive struggle... Equality thus came to mean for many new

Americans not only political equality but also equality of opportunity. " However, pushing the concept of equality to mean that all people are equally endowed in genetic "gifts and talents" seems implausible and counter-productive. Nobel laureate F.A. Hayek pointed out "Nothing ... is more damaging to the demand for equal treatment... than to base it on so obviously untrue an assumption as that of the factual equality of all men (Seligman, 1991:195).

Biemuller states that "while some observed diversity is clearly the product of environmental disadvantage, much diversity is also observed in environmentally advantaged populations (Biemuller, 1993:7). Aimee Howley concurs: " [the ruling elite] is not endowed genetically with superior intelligence as has been suggested by some educators and psychologists. In fact, ... children of the ruling elite are probably no more likely to be gifted than are children from the middle classes (Howley, 1986:118)." Noticeably under-represented from the ranks of the gifted, are children from the lower socioeconomic strata - which has more to do with the power of ascribed characteristics than innate ability.

It seems that our notion of equity in education is based on a misunderstanding of the Constitution and our own biology. If we are born with different gifts and talents, and we are born into different environments, our challenge is to do the best we can with what we have, appreciating those qualities which make each of us unique. It is important that we acknowledge our diversity instead of denying it, which does not mean accepting real inequities in opportunity. " Practices that ignore the reality of developmental diversity in achievement may actually *amplify* the impact of naturally occurring educational diversity....educational programs that *acknowledge* diversity provide the best hope for minimizing its impact on skill acquisition (Biemuller, 1993:7)."

Our inability to distinguish between equal in the body politic, equal opportunity and equal genetic and socio-economic endowment lead to misdirected and misconceived policy.

> For at least half a century, we as a nation have continually rejected research findings about the gifted because reality refuses to be politically correct. Americans persist in applying the political concept 'all men are created equal' to the intellectual realm, with painful and costly results. Even more perversely, we loosen this straitjacket for those who fall below the mean while tightening it for those who land above.
>
> Burke, 1992.

The gifted have suffered an odd form of discrimination. American society, at least the vast majority who are not labeled gifted or talented (another inequity as everyone has gifts and talents) has viewed the 'gifted and talented' as having more than their fair share. " In fact, it now appears that gifted children tend to be superior in every way - in intelligence, in physique, in social attractiveness, in achievement, in emotional stability, even in moral character (Hallahan, 1991:412)." That many of these children comes from homes with high socio-economic status obviously adds to the perceived inequity.

The result is that society is reluctant to provide appropriate education.

> It is difficult to elicit sympathy for gifted children, and next to impossible to arrange sustained public support for education that meets their needs... Gifted children and youths remain the most underserved population in our nation's schools... in fact, the attitude we often encounter is that if gifted children are really so capable, they will find ways to help themselves.... Opponents of special education for gifted students argue that it is inhumane and un-American to segregate gifted students for instruction, to allocate special resources for the education of those already advantaged...
>
> Hallahan, 1991:421-422

Unfortunately, the disadvantaged have been pitted against those perceived as overly advantaged.

In any population, gifted children are, by definition, a minority. In any democracy, therefore, their parents will have a hard time gaining votes for programs that benefit them unless society sees investing in the education of the gifted as in the national interest. This has rarely been the case, in fact, the reverse is more common.

> When the needs of the economically oppressed students were given precedence over those of exceptionally bright pupils, these two groups became symbolically polarized. The gifted were seen as advantaged, while the economically oppressed were seen as disadvantaged. Thus, the educational benefits provided to the former were considered antagonistic to the needs of the latter... This artificial antagonism obscured the need for both groups for appropriate education, while at the same time it reinforced the schools' role in maintaining social stability.
>
> Howley, 1986:120

A great deal of the misdirection and contradiction in education for the gifted derives from the perception that the gifted are unfairly endowed and that democracy requires that all people are created equal in intelligence. It is very difficult for schools to provide education for gifted students that truly answers their needs. The 'fairest' way to educate the gifted (and certainly the cheapest) too often becomes to repress their abilities which simultaneously elevates other students without challenging them (or their teachers). In a battle between the haves and have nots, education for the gifted , seen as elitist, will lose, even though those who lose most will be gifted children from poor and minority families.

ELITISM:

The word elite derives from the Latin eligere, electus: *e + legere,* chosen.. It has come to mean "the choice, or best , or superior part of a body or class of persons However, time and an overemphasis on egalitarianism have imparted a negative connotation to the word, implying snobbishness, selectivity, and unfair special attention (Russell, 1988:4)." This statement incorporates many of the contradictions that plague discussion of education for the gifted. In a democratic society it is not acceptable to think about one group as choice , best or superior. To do so does suggest snobbishness and selectivity. However, offering gifted children an education that meets their special needs does not constitute "unfair special attention."

The same author goes on to state: gifted children are elite in the same way that anyone becomes a champion, a record-holder, a soloist, an inventor, or a leader in important realms of human endeavor (Russell, 1988:4). We encourage children to excel in athletics; yet we denigrate them as eggheads and nerds or if they excel intellectually. Let us look at the issue of anti-intellectualism to see how it impacts education for the gifted.

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM:

Richard Hofstadter warned that our society views intellectuals circumspectly at best. While intelligence:

> works within the framework of limited but clearly stated goals...it is of such universal use that it can daily be seen at work and admired ... Intellect, on the other hand, is the critical, creative, and contemplative side of mind. Whereas intelligence seeks to grasp , manipulate, re-order, adjust, intellect examines, ponders, wonders, theorizes, criticizes, imagines. Intelligence will seize the

> immediate meaning in a situation and evaluate it. Intellect evaluates evaluations, and looks for the meaning of situations as a whole.
>
> Hofstadter, 1963:24

As Hofstadter traced the development of anti-intellectualism in the United States he was struck by the discontinuity between Americans' great faith in the power of education and the many ways in which " something has always been missing in our educational performance." Hofstadter found at least a partial explanation in the fact that "mass education was not founded primarily upon a passion for the development of mind, or upon pride in learning and culture for their own sakes, but rather upon the supposed political and economic benefits of education." Mann and other reformers "sold" education by stressing "its role not in achieving high culture but in forging an acceptable form of democratic society (Hofstadter, 1963: 305)."

Perhaps we are seen most clearly by foreigners. Bertrand Russell:

> saw mass-schooling in the United States had a profoundly anti-democratic intent, that it was a scheme to artificially deliver national unity by eliminating human variation and by eliminating the forge that produces variation: the family. According to Lord Russell, mass-schooling produced a recognizably *American* student: anti-intellectual, superstitious, lacking in self-confidence, and with less of what Russell called ; inner freedom; than his other counterpart in any other nation he knew of, past or present.
>
> Gatto, 1991:77

It is a frightening indictment.

Anti-intellectualism in the United States seems based, in part, on our antipathy as a democratic people to ideas such as Social Darwinism that suggest some are more fit than others to lead. Although, in many ways, we have built a society that furthers Social Darwinism, we don't want to admit it. Anti-intellectualism grows from the confusion that intellectualism is the realm of the

elite. By providing second-rate education to immigrant children, we created generations of adults who felt threatened by using their minds.

It is easy to think that a people exploring a new land, pushing back the frontier of "civilized", if not civil, occupation would be more interested in solving practical problems than in intellectual thought. However, until the mid 1850's, the rates of literacy, particularly in New England, were very high. Though frontier families must have been exhausted by the rigors of the day, in the evening, they did not have the demon of anti-intellectualism, television, and were thrown back on their own resources such as reading, storytelling and singing and talking together.

As immigrant children became adults, the "life skills" they learned from teachers who thought them incapable of anything more demanding became the skills they passed on to future generations. It seems extraordinary that reformers took such a negative view of human capability. However, by the 1930s:

> the reforms were firmly in place. A new system of secondary studies had been installed, in which a small minority of college--bound students were expected to pursue intellectually serious work while everyone else was taking courses explicitly designed for those less able, less willing, or less interested. American educators quickly built a system around the assumption that most students didn't have what it took to be serious about the great issues of human life, and that even if they had the wit, they had neither the will nor the futures that would support heavy-duty study.
>
> Powell, 1985:245.

These reforms are sadly pessimistic about human capabilities. But reformers "embraced them in a brightly hopeful spirit...convinced that if schools would

adopt modern methods and scientific principles, they could do wonders with the new students (Powell, 199: 245).

This legacy has eroded our educational system over the last century. Instead of offering a liberating education to our people, we have created a system that prepares children poorly for reading, writing, thinking and analyzing. We offer "life skills", forgetting that narrowly defined skills will be outmoded by the time students need to use them. Only a very few are privileged by a truly challenging and intellectually awakening education.

Edwin Delattre "notes that the study of America's founding documents 'illustrates the standards of intellectual quality that should inform school curricula generally. There is no reason to believe that our students deserve less or that they cannot rise in school to the challenge of intellectual work that has, and has had for centuries, enormous consequences for all of our lives outside of school.' (News & Views, April, 1994:iv)." How different our system would be today if educators had used this measure of excellence and followed the suggestions of Charles Eliot's Committee of Ten..

BEWARE THE INTELLECTUAL BEARING GIFTS:

Many writers have noted that one important function of a school is to "reproduce existing social structures." Craig and Aimee Howley argue " that schools 'hidden curriculum' involves the maintenance or reproduction of conditions of inequality and stratification.... [S]chools do function to maintain the structural position of the ruling elite.... The ruling class wants to protect its position by attempting to suppress the possible ascendance of any competing class. The intellectual elite is a class which historically has challenged existing political structures (Howley, 1986:119-118)." The intellectual questions what is, the successful burgher enjoys it and manipulates knowledge to serve practical

ends. A boys' school in Greenwich, Connecticut, which caters to the sons of successful business people has a motto that captures this viewpoint: "With all thy getting, get understanding. "

The Howleys make a strong case that schools have channeled the intellectually gifted into narrow streams of technical expertise, diverting their talents from the more important curriculum of reading, writing, thinking, analyzing and questioning.

> The prevalent trend in gifted education in U.S. schools both reinforce the myth of the meritocracy ...and undermine the development of a cohesive intellectual elite. By failing to provide superior academic instruction to the most academically able, schools deprive these youngsters of the intellectual tools necessary for critical social understanding and action. By cultivating traits of compliance, pragmatism, and career orientation, schools propel bright but docile students toward future roles as managers, professionals, and semi-autonomous workers.
>
> Howley, 1986:11

The result is a workforce adequate to deal with what has been but unable to question the status quo to create what could be. Without practice in thinking critically students can't be critical thinkers. Without creating dialogue, 'which is indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality." Teachers and students can not "understand the forces that give them a base but also entrap them (Freire, 1987:64-65)." In short they cannot become educated.

Educators and society also use the expanded curriculum of the consolidated high school to placate the small group of parents and students who want the semblance of a challenging curriculum, if only to assure entrance to college and a "good" job. But even upper track classes seem devoid of real intellectual

challenge. By trying to be all things to all students, the consolidated high schools

> have stunted [their] capacity to take all students seriously. They have blocked teachers' capacity to cultivate those qualities long valued in educated men and women - the ability to read well and critically, to write plainly and persuasively, and to reason clearly. And they have nurtured a constrained and demeaning vision of education among Americans, a vision that persistently returns to haunt the profession that helped create it.
>
> Powell, 1986:308

This has resulted in programs for the gifted that are limited: games that distract rather than illuminate.

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot points out that another reason " for the seeming focus away from intellectual substance is that high schools always seem poised towards the future (Lightfoot, 1983: 356). The Headmaster of The Groton School echoes this thought " How easy it is to view education as preparation for the next level: Elementary school gets you ready for secondary school which gets you ready for college which gets you ready for graduate school which gets you ready for a job. That is a very limiting view of education (Polk,1994:3)."

The comprehensive high schools that grew rapidly in the 1950s offered "selective excellence" a goal flawed by the reality that excellence for a few created a minority subject to criticism as an elite and vulnerable to majority rule.

> The constituency for quality was ... revealed [in 1950s] to be quite modest, hardly suited to expand its domain in the face of other pressures. The differentiated curriculum, which was a cheap way to manage diversity among secondary students, was a poor way to protect or expand quality in secondary school. Selective excellence meant that the demanding small section of schools would be perennially threatened by the larger explicitly undemanding, essentially anti-intellectual whole.
>
> Powell, 1986:299-300

High schools were popular institutions, subject to popular control. Intellectualism wasn't popular and had not been inculcated in generations thought incapable of critical thinking and trained to avoid it. In a numerical test of strength, the anti-intellectual majority will vote down allocation for gifted education.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION?

Endicott Peabody, founding head of the Groton School answered this question for his own students "to prepare people for the active work of life. " It is interesting to think how this differs from preparation for the life of work, which has become the focus of public education. It is discouraging to compare the curriculum of Groton School, which emphasizes the " need to develop certain skills[:] Thinking imaginatively, speaking and writing clearly, and reasoning quantitatively....(Polk, 1994:3)" with a new course for Freshman just announced by the Mount Desert Island High School. "All freshmen will take a year-long course designed to equip them with basic life skills such as computer literacy, insuring a car, balancing a checkbook, and weight control (The Bar Harbor Times, May 19, 1994:1)."

Unfortunately, we have developed an anti-intellectual approach to education that sees children as developing capital rather than allowing them joy in the growth and working of their own minds, and the luxury of developing their minds without a specific or practical purpose. "Schools have evolved in the United States not as part of a pursuit of equality, but rather to meet the needs of capitalist employers for a disciplined and skilled labor force...(Howley, 1993:4)."

I think the goal of education must derive from the meaning of the word: E + Ducere: to lead out , to bring forth. Paulo Freire showed that this type of

education empowers individuals allowing them to " perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform (Freire, 1993:31)." Hannah Arendt "the aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any (Gatto, 1993:xi:." Education must empower , enabling rather than disabling.

Mortimer Adler reminds us that universal suffrage and universal schooling are inextricably bound together. "The one without the other is a perilous delusion." He sees education as a "life long process of which schooling is only a small but necessary part...that should open the doors to the world of learning and provide the guidelines for exploring it (Adler, 1982:9)."

Howley identifies three goals of education that are within the schools' responsibilities: 1. to promote ethical reasoning...to act as a conscience of the polity...to give students the academic background and the personal entitlement to offer meaningful critique of the institutions of modern life. 2. Schooling should function as the harbinger of democracy 3. as human knowledge and understanding are justified in their own right, without reference to their immediate utility,,, schools have an aesthetic mission [which] requires schools to provide all that is necessary to prepare students to construct personal interpretations of the world (Howley, 1993:16)."

The Howley's vision gives heart and soul to the curriculum offered by Groton School:

> The Groton curriculum is predicated on the belief that certain qualities of mind are of major importance: precise and articulate communication, the ability to compute accurately and to reason quantitatively; a grasp of scientific approaches to problem-solving, and understanding of the cultural, social, scientific, and political background of Western civilization; and the ability to reason

> carefully and logically and to think imaginatively and sensitively. Consequently, The School puts considerable emphasis on language, mathematics, science , history and the arts.
>
> Cooksey, 1985:30.

Perhaps the ideal is a combination of the purposes suggested by the Howleys, Adler, and Freire with the classic methods and curriculum offered at Groton.

EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED:

As we have seen, there are many ways in which our society is ambivalent about gifted and talented students. What does this mean for the schooling of these children? The argument seems to divide educators: those who favor acceleration or enrichment, those who favor homogeneous or ability grouping.

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS:

Educators such as John Goodlad, Anne Wheelock and Jeannie Oakes argue that tracking creates differences that would be minimized if students worked together in heterogeneous groups. Standardized tests may be culturally squewed, preventing minority and low SES children from demonstrating their abilities, teachers stereotype children and may literally not see the potential in the gifted minority or low SES child. The children of families with higher income may be more successful at getting their children into upper-level tracks not only because they have different expectations for their children but because school administrators and teachers want to keep them from sending their children to private schools. Expectations can be profoundly important determinants of the way people react to each other and to themselves. Teachers who expect less of students will get less and students live up (or down) to the image they see reflected back . And students can change.

Educators argue that creating a top-track diminishes the value of the work done by all the other students. "For example, Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton tell of a high school that, after adding an 'honors' calculus class to its math program, found that student performance declined overall. With the establishment of a 'top track' students and teachers alike came to assume that *only* students ranked at the top could achieve at the highest levels, and all involved expected less than before of those in the regular classes (Wheelock,1990:91)."

Untracking can benefit students in other ways. For example, a school that carefully examines what it is doing may discover that methods used in teaching the gifted apply equally well to all students. We learn by doing not by being 'done to' ,and too much of what now occurs in schools is numbingly boring. If the style and methods education for the gifted are more involving and exciting than the usual fare, then they should engage all students.

> Untracking involves more than the regrouping of students. Designing a challenging and interesting curriculum for everyone leads many untracking schools to extend the learning opportunities frequently reserved for students labeled gifted and talented' to all those in heterogeneous classes. This strategy is not one of watering down traditional curricula to an 'average level; rather it aims at adopting approaches often available only to the 'high' groups and making them accessible to more students
>
> Wheelock, 1990:149

I think this is a laudable approach but wonder what the effects would be on students who are intellectually gifted.

Another issue concerns the fact that students in middle and lower tracks have had more choice in courses than those on the upper or college track. I think it makes sense to proscribe more narrowly courses for all students to ensure they have chosen challenging and meaningful courses in some logical

sequence. (I was astounded to discover this week that our college educated Office Manager had never heard of D-Day! She explained that in her high school teachers 'taught' through lectures and multiple-choice questions, that students filled in the answers to work-sheets geared to the chapter they had just read, and that one could do well in school and not learn much of anything.)

Concern for the way lower-track students see themselves also underlies efforts to de-track just as over a hundred years ago Horace Mann pleaded with upper-class parents that they consider the effect on less fortunate children of sending their children to private schools:

> has not the course which some of you have pursued in relation to the education of your own children tended to reduce the reputation of our excellent free school system?... the consciousness that they are attending a school unworthy of the patronage of those whom they have been led to regard as the better part of the community, will degrade the children of the less-favored classes in their own estimation, and destroy that self-respect which is essential to improvement either in science or in morals. This feeling of degradation will hang like a millstone about the necks of the children of the poor.
>
> Glenn, 1987:219

I believe, however, that we must consider the individual needs of each child and that intellectually gifted children should not be used to their detriment.

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS:

The argument for ability grouping and acceleration seems, to me very strong. Although Andrew Biemuller agrees with Oakes and Goodlad that schools are "over-tracked", he thinks "that educational programs that *acknowledge* diversity provide the best hope for minimizing its

impact...(Biemuller, 1993:7)." He makes the important point that : "the actual magnitude of observed educational skill diversity in our society is great-involving a range of more than four grades by grade 4. ... Another way of looking at the same data is to note that the level of performance on mathematics attained by the 10th percentile children near 12 years of age was attained by the 90th percentile children *when they were less that 8 years old* (Biemuller, 1993, 7-8)."

My son tested more than eight years ahead of his classmates in reading skills when he was in fourth grade. Though he was placed two years ahead, he encountered problems with teachers and students who were a bit awed by his knowledge and intelligence, but also annoyed and daunted by it. The argument against removing the brightest children from the classroom is vitiated by the reality that having a child who is many years ahead in development (in one particular area or several) can also be difficult. The child may dominate other children too easily, learn without working, feel s/he is alienating classmates or the teacher, stop asking or answering questions, and have a difficult time socially because he is acting his age; it is just that his chronological age is years younger than his intellectual age..

Biemuller has found "that high-quality instruction geared to student ability levels in specific skills results in greater gains for at-risk (low SES gifted) elementary school children. Feldhuysen thinks that some tracking will be necessary.

> Grouping the gifted for all or part of the school day accommodates achievement and readiness levels and can serve other purposes as well. Gifted and talented children complain a great deal about the boredom of their classroom experience; they are forced to spend a lot of time being taught things they already know, doing repetitive drill sheets and activities, and receiving instruction on new material at too slow a pace. These experiences probably

> cause gifted youth to lose motivation to learn, to get by with minimum effort, or to reject school as a worthwhile experience.
> Feldhuysen, 1989:9

Teachers must find ways to engage all students without pitting them against each other, which is particularly difficult in a culture built on competition.

James Conant argued that "the academically talented student, as a rule is not being sufficiently challenged, does not work hard enough, and his program of academic subjects in not of sufficient range (Conant, 1958:40). Like Adler he thought that each child should have an individualized program, (what would now be called an IEP), and that though students of similar proclivities might often end up in the same classes, it was important to avoid "tracking" students.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING:

One important way in which intellectually gifted children demonstrate their gifts is by proceeding rapidly through material that other children take longer to understand. Retarding the development of children so gifted seems unfair."Too often, when children are initially grouped by ability in order to avoid asking the 'less advanced' children to do the impossible, the 'more advanced' are then taught too slowly (Biemuller, 1993:8)" Proposals for heterogeneous grouping and cooperative education that result in some children usually providing assistance in academic matters, and other usually receiving such assistance, appear likely to reinforce dependency (Biemuller, 1993:10)."

Advocates of the gifted such as William Gustin of the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkin's University and Linda Silverman, director of the Gifted Child Development Center, in Denver, Colorado agree that "gifted programs are being eroded by the increasing popularity of cooperative learning, and gifted students are being exploited in cooperative groups." They think cooperative learning "has threatened to wipe out the gifted program."

John Feldhuysen, director of the Gifted Education Resource Center at Purdue University states :children at all levels need learning opportunities that are challenging. Gifted students in heterogeneous cooperative learning groups are denied such opportunities because they must work at a pace determined by the group." (Willis:1990:8). Robert Slavin, also at Johns Hopkins has found that "heterogeneous grouping is 'consistently effective' for students in the top third, but he concedes that the effects on the very brightest students, the top 5 percent or so-have not been specifically examined,(Willis, 1990:8)

A few researchers such as Leta Hollingsworth, who studied children with IQs over 180 "observed that in terms of vocabulary, level of analytic thought, and attention span these children lived on a different planet from their average age-mates....She concluded that socializing the very gifted would not be achieved by mixing them with children too far below their intellectual level (Burke, 1993:)."

ACCELERATION:

Although I agree that acceleration is probably a maligned idea, I am concerned that simply moving children into the next class does not address concerns about the quality of education and the manner of teaching at any grade. The quality of teaching has improved in some schools, but more rote learning at "the next stage" will not teach any children to read, write, think, discuss and analyze. However, I agree that most gifted children will not be hurt by acceleration They tend to be larger, healthier, stronger and more adept socially, and one or two years of acceleration should not be significant. Feldhuysen reminds us that " *acceleration* is a misnomer; the process is really one of bringing gifted and talented youth up to a suitable level of instruction commensurate with their achievement levels and readiness so that they are properly challenged to learn the new material. (Feldhuysen, 1989:8)."

ENRICHMENT:

I think the basic problem with enrichment or pull-out activities is that teachers are forced to come up with things for the gifted students to do that are extraneous to their studies. I once spent a day with a gifted teacher while she worked with students. One by one, the gifted children came in for "enrichment." For reasons I did not understand, the teacher had decided to teach each of these students how to enlarge a comic strip figure. I could find no redeeming feature of this activity except that it enabled children to work one-on-one with an adult.

Other critics of pull-out programs point out:

> many of the activities provided for children under the guise of 'special education for the gifted and talented' cannot be justified. If gifted or average children spend their time playing games designed to foster creativity or problem-solving strategies, they are not being served well. If the traditional content-oriented curriculum (which emphasizes pouring facts into children's heads) is replaced by an equally inane process-oriented curriculum no real progress has been made. A defensible program for gifted pupils must state how education for them will be the same as and how it will be different from education for all children
>
> Hallahan, 1991:430

Craig Howley quoting Borland adds that " special instruction for the gifted often consists of " an array of faddish, meaningless trivia--kits, games, mechanical step-by-step problem-solving methods, pseudoscience, and pop psychology' (Howley,1993:12)."

Programs for the gifted rarely teach them habits and qualities of mind of which they are capable. Whether the causes have to do with anti-intellectualism, fear of elitism, society's view that the intellectually gifted are

dangerous, or a need to keep people in their places the effect remains that the gifted are woefully under-educated and poorly educated. We lose the resource of their fully developed intelligence and intellect, and they lose delight in the working of their own minds. Adler reminds us that " human resources are the nation's greatest potential riches. To squander them is to impoverish our future (Adler, 1982:78). I agree, but ask that we also act in fairness to individual children and stop penalizing them for being gifted.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS and ADMINISTRATORS:

We can probably agree that we must change the way we educate the intellectually gifted, though it would be more difficult to agree how to make appropriate changes. Unfortunately, it seems we lack the resources we need: highly skilled and well-educated educators who appreciate what all children including the gifted, are capable of, and can articulate this to the community.

Sadly, the one thing on which educational theorists seem to agree is that our teachers are under-qualified for the tasks before them. Adler tells us the present teacher-training programs turn out persons who are not sufficiently equipped with the knowledge, the intellectual skills, or the developed understanding needed to guide and help the young in the course of study we have recommended (Adler, 1982:60)." Craig Howley tells us that

> teachers rarely seems to act like intellectuals. One indication of this characteristic of teachers is their relatively low performance on measures of academic competence. Another is their generally limited interest in scholarly activities....the climate of schools conditions the routine compliance of teachers and limits their intellectual curiosity and productivity....[Studies] document the low standardized test scores of prospective teachers....In addition, there appears to be a negative correlation between teachers' academic ability and their tenure as teachers.
>
> Howley, 1993:8

Howley finds that few teachers take upper-level liberal arts courses in college and that studies show that few read often or deeply. One study showed teachers average 3.2 books per year, all 'popular' another only slightly more encouraging showed they read 8.5 books per year (Howley, 1993:10).

Dr. Thomas Sowell recently received letter from a schoolteacher " asking for an autographed picture for his class because it would 'ultemetly' help his students to have [Sowell] as a 'roll model..' " Sowell asks if this is atypical and reminds us that " a few years ago a study showed the average verbal Scholastic Aptitude Test score for aspiring teachers to be 389 out of 800 (Sowell, 1994:52).

This really should not surprise us since most teachers are products of the system inadvertently designed to keep people in their places and deter them from intellectual pursuits. Teachers are, as we have seen, some of the least successful graduates. We should , in fact, be surprised that there are any teachers struggling against such vast odds as the public schools present and that there are a few who succeed. Compounding the problem, (literally because investing in training only to lose the best 'trainees' is expensive in time) is the reality that many of the best recruits to teaching will leave. In a poignant article entitled "Why I Quit Teaching" Owen Murphy explains:

> I first wrote to you on Aug. 30 of last year. It was a long letter, full of enthusiasm and full of optimism... I'm writing to you today so that you'll know why I felt compelled to resign in midyear. In essence, I found myself overwhelmed by a school system over which I had little or no control; a school system that exhausted me physically and mentally, a school system that dulled my enthusiasm, dimmed my optimism and drained my confidence; a school system which I finally decided I could neither change nor in good conscience continue to work for .
>
> Murphy, 1994:110

It is particularly sad to lose someone like Owen Murphy who seems intelligent, enthusiastic and articulate. Besides, he can spell.

The school climate discourages teachers from seeing themselves as intellectuals. Through the efforts of unions, and perhaps as a natural outflow from the watering down of the curriculum, teaching has become 'deskilled.' Howley found research confirmed that teachers who came to the schools eager for intellectual and demanding professional life soon became discouraged "most teachers who begin with a sense of intellectual mission lose it after several years of teaching, and either continue to teach in an uninspired routinized way or leave the profession to avoid intellectual stultification and emotional despair (Howley, 1993:11). As most administrators rise from the pool of teachers, I see little hope that the schools will make changes necessary for all children, and, particularly, the gifted.

WHAT CAN WE DO ?

I have a "modest proposal." I think we need to look carefully at the successes of the private schools, casting aside prejudices and fears that public schools will suffer in the comparison, and incorporate ideas that have worked. I have found public school teachers and administrators extremely reluctant to do this. I think they are burying themselves in sand that threatens to smother the public schools if they don't dig out and look around for new ideas. Too often, I have heard that there is nothing for private schools and public schools to learn from each other. The culture of private and public institutions are different, but I think there is much to gain by an honest examination of each.

Donald A. Erickson, Professor Emeritus at UCLA concurs:

> Much research comparing public and private schools conveys a serious falsehood: The apparent superiority of private schools is trivial and misleading. It results from skimming the best students. If public and private schools played by the same rules , they would produce the same results. ... To counteract the falsehood, I will offer evidence of special advantages, anything but trivial, provided by private schools. I will discuss strategies, responsible for the benefits, that go far beyond student skimming and are essential to effectiveness in all schools, public and private. Some of the strategies were once common in public schools, especially small schools serving reasonably homogeneous communities in an era before recent centralization and teacher unionization, but are increasingly unthinkable there today, so public and private schools *cannot* follow the same rules and produce the same results.
>
> Erickson, 1994:5

As I have written in another paper, one of the strengths of a small rural school is that it retains close connections to its community, and teachers and administrators know their students and there is a cohesive mission. Class size is small and budget constraints shield students from frivolous extras (Lawrence, 1993). Small rural schools, I would argue, share many of the strengths of private schools.

Since the 1960s the private schools have changed remarkably. Schools that once included few if any minority students, then defined as Jews, Italians and Irish, now actively work to attract students of diverse ethnic and financial backgrounds.

> Meanwhile, in the private sector, many of the old elite schools had democratized and were sponsoring scholarships for blacks and urban poor. The most impressive shift had occurred in the Roman Catholic schools which were the most heavily concentrated in urban areas and which accounted for two-thirds of all students enrolled in nonpublic schools.
>
> Grant, 1988:168

Erickson postulates that the difference between private and public schools is explained largely by the private schools insistence on communitarian similarities and identification with family, and the public school's model on the factory. "Even before the turn of the century, public school administrators widely depicted schools as much like factories (Katz, 1968). In contrast, founders of elite boarding schools viewed their schools as much like families (McLachlan, 1970)." Erickson highlights important characteristics of private schools that are very similar to the characteristics of successful small rural schools and some alternative schools : small class size, well-qualified committed teachers who are relatively happy in their work, " notable internal consistency, " few discipline problems, student participation in running the school, clearly focused goals, and community and parental involvement and support. (Erickson, 1994:7-9). The curriculum is more demanding in private schools both in depth and breadth. " On average, American public high school seniors take one year less English and math, and more than a year less foreign language than boarding school students (Coleman, 1982:20).

I do not want to write an apology for private schools here , but I do hope that public school teachers and administrators will study the strengths of these schools, including the spontaneity of "exciting intellectual adventure" created by teachers and students working together (Lightfoot, 1983 :361) .

My second modest proposal is that we abolish undergraduate majors in education. I believe teachers should follow a rigorous course of study in liberal arts or math and science before studying for a graduate degree in education. As we graduate teachers who love to learn and know something worth teaching, we will raise the level of education so that all students, including the intellectually gifted are buoyed.

Thirdly, because I believe it will be very difficult for the public system to make the fundamental , systemic changes on a cultural level that are required to improve education in the United States, I think we must encourage the growth of private schools. However, because power and money corrupt the finest ideals, I don't believe government should fund private schools directly. Parents should receive tax refunds equivalent to the local per capita cost of public school for each child they take out of the public school. They can apply this tax refund to a private tuition or home schooling, but must educate their children in a responsible manner. I think we are preserving the public schools to save jobs for teachers and administrators. I would rather save children.

Finally, I believe as we raise the level of discourse for all students, the intellectually gifted will not be seen as elitist, and teaching them will not be viewed an undemocratic. I believe schools should be small, that students should be in homerooms organized heterogeneously throughout high school, and should work with a relatively small number of teachers who have time to get to know them and care about them. I think some courses, and parts of all courses can be taught in heterogeneous groups, but the goal should be to give each student a chance to excel. Gifted students should have the chance to work on special projects and with groups of their peers as well as with students who are not as gifted intellectually. I would discourage pull-out programs with little relevance to the curriculum and encourage acceleration where necessary and individual projects to supplement the regular curriculum.

Albert Shanker sums up the argument effectively as follows:

> When confronted with the contrast in achievement between U.S. students and kids in other advanced industrialized nations, people usually say that other systems are elitist, and we educate everybody. But which is more elitist. A system that is able to get 36 percent of all its students who pass a demanding exam or one

> like ours where only 4 percent pass? Every country has an elite group of students, but ours is tiny, and these other countries are approaching the point where half of their youngsters will belong to the elite. We think that any system with high standards educates the few at the expense of the many; these figures show us something quite different.
>
> Shanker, 1994:43

I think we must refocus education on the work of life, preparing all our children so well that no segment of our society need tyrannize another. It may be naive to assume we can achieve this goal, but in the trying we will achieve more than by not trying.

BACKWORD

I come to an end , if not the end, of this study knowing I have learned a lot and that there is a lot more to learn. Surely Horace Mann and the Progressives did not intend to produce a system of education that would "dumb down" our students. Surely they would be as discouraged and saddened as I am to read that "U.S. high-school students spend an average of only three hours every school day on core academic subjects...just 50 percent of the typical high-school day, " resulting in a deficit over four years of 2068 hours less than the Germans, 1820 less than the French and 1710 hours less than Japanese students (Newsweek, 1994:58). I doubt James Conant promoted consolidation of schools to undermine American education. And yet, I agree with The National Commission on Excellence in Education " If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war (Commission, 1984:5).

Errors of such magnitude made by honest, well-intentioned, intelligent people must make us pause in creating massive reform today. However, there is a danger that we will over-react. Seeing the failure of 'professional' and large bureaucracy we may try to institutionalize the strengths of schools we admire. I am concerned that by institutionalizing we will kill their magic.

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